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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 000749

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: LEBANON: JUMBLATT SATISFIED WITH DOHA AGREEMENT

REF: A. BEIRUT 733

[B](#). BEIRUT 739

[C](#). BEIRUT 726

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#). (C) Druze leader Walid Jumblatt is satisfied with the agreement reached in Doha, which included language on Hizballah's arms that was "not bad." He predicted Future Movement leader Saad Hariri would become the next prime minister. "Out," according to Jumblatt, were Defense Minister Elias Murr (who, Jumblatt predicts, will spend the next year politicking in the Metn) and Free Patriotic Movement leader Michel Aoun.

[2](#). (C) Jumblatt stressed the need for unity among March 14 Christians, especially to win critical seats in the 2009 parliamentary elections. He explained his recent rapprochement with rival Druze leader Talal Arlsan as necessary to prevent further Hizballah violence against the Druze in the Aley and Chouf regions. The Iran-Syria-Qatari access had emerged victorious from Doha, Jumblatt said, at the expense of Saudi Arabia. End summary.

[3](#). (C) CDA Sison, accompanied by Pol/Econ Chief and Senior LES Political Advisor, met with Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, his wife Nora, and Telecom Minister Marwan Hamadeh at Jumblatt's residence in Clemenceau on May 22. An upbeat Jumblatt expressed wonder that Hizballah's May 7-15 "siege" of Beirut had resulted in a political agreement, soon-to-be election of a president, and soaring share prices in downtown Beirut's Solidere district. Nora added that she already had begun working on this summer's Beiteddine music festival in the Chouf, canceled the previous two years because of armed conflicts. Jumblatt said March 14 had done its best in Doha, and succeeded.

SATISFIED WITH DOHA AGREEMENT

[4](#). (C) Jumblatt characterized the Doha agreement (reftel) statement on Hizballah weapons as "not bad." The language was finalized at the last minute, and unknown to the National Dialogue participants until the Qataris read the full text of the agreement at the May 21 press conference.

[5](#). (C) Jumblatt said that, gauging Hizballah MP Mohamad

Raad's expression during the reading, Hizballah was not happy with the statement. He noted that Hizballah SYG Hassan Nasrallah had telephoned Iranian FM Mottaki and Qatari PM/FM Hamad bin Jassim (HbJ) "maybe 20 times" during the Doha negotiations.

¶6. (C) Fellow Druze and Minister of Information Ghazi Aridi reportedly told Jumblatt that HbJ's impression of Hizballah during the talks was it was "arrogant." Jumblatt added that the Arab League representatives in Doha clearly viewed the opposition as the major obstacle to achieving an agreement, especially in the manner in which they treated Amal leader Nabih Berri and Free Patriotic Movement leader Michel Aoun.

¶7. (C) Now the issue of Hizballah arms was in the hands of the new president, Jumblatt continued. He predicted, as other contacts have remarked (septels), that the theme of Sleiman's election speech would be "national liberation," especially given that May 25 is Lebanese Liberation Day, marking the eighth anniversary of Israeli's withdrawal from Lebanon. (Note: We have since heard that the Lebanese now plan to celebrate Liberation Day on May 26. End note.)

CABINET PORTFOLIOS:
SAAD IN, SINIORA,
DEFENSE MINISTER,
AOUN OUT

¶8. (C) Jumblatt expected Saad Hariri to become prime minister, stating "Siniora is out." HbJ reportedly had

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promised Saad from the beginning that he would respect Saad's role as the Sunni leader, "and he delivered," Jumblatt said. However, the Syrians were angling for former PM Najib Mikati, Transportation Minister Mohamad Safadi, or Hariri lawyer Bahije Tabbarah.

¶9. (C) Jumblatt expected Greek Orthodox MP Michel Murr to become Minister of the Interior. Murr would use the need to make his son Elias, currently Minister of Defense, a candidate in Metn for the 2009 parliamentary elections as a "pretext to evict" him from the cabinet. (Comment: Rumors are that the Murrs are looking for a strong win in the Metn in 2009 to position Elias to take the Interior Ministry in the 2009 cabinet -- a father-son one-two punch. End comment.)

¶10. (C) Acknowledging CDA Sison's statement that the individuals named as the new Minister of Defense and Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) Commander would be key players in U.S. military assistance planning, Jumblatt urged the U.S. to talk to president-elect and current Lebanese LAF Commander General Michel Sleiman. He believed Deputy LAF Commander Mesri (a Druze) would become acting Commander once Sleiman was elected president.

¶11. (C) Jumblatt argued that Saad should keep the Ministry of Finance, which much sign off on all government decrees, for the Sunnis, advocating a "good guy" like current Minister Azour. However, he admitted that Azour, a technocrat, did not have enough political weight to earn one of the four sovereign ministries (Foreign Affairs, Defense, Interior, and Finance).

AOUN: "WOUNDED BEAR"

¶12. (C) One of the big results of Doha, Jumblatt said, was that "Aoun is out." He is a "wounded bear," he said; now it was essential for the March 14 Christians (especially Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea and Phalange leader Amine Gemayel) to stick together. He lambasted Geagea's signing of the Doha agreement "with reservations" as "ridiculous."

CHRISTIANS KEY TO

WINNING 2009 ELECTIONS

¶13. (C) Regarding Beirut, Jumblatt stated confidently that Saad's Future Movement would have a "solid constituency" in the western zone, where he would win all 10 seats. He suspected Saad had made deals with Hizballah and the Armenians to divide the four seats in the central Bachoura zone equally between March 14 and the opposition (two for Future, one for Hizballah, and one for the Armenian opposition). Saad had resisted giving up seats in Bachoura, Jumblatt relayed, adding that he told him March 14 would not be able to explain to the Lebanese people that Doha failed because of a dispute over two seats in central Beirut.

¶14. (C) For the five seats in predominantly Christian eastern zone, it was paramount that March 14 win over the Christian vote to secure a legislative victory in the 2009 elections. Jumblatt also stressed the need for March 14 leaders Amine Gemayel and Nassib Lahoud, along with independent Michel Murr, to work together to defeat Aoun in the Metn. Michel Sleiman should also play the Christian card to secure votes away from Aoun.

¶15. (C) Saad also needed to do his part by competing, via scholarship funds, social assistance, and land purchases, with Hizballah efforts to buy public support. Saad reportedly had asked for \$400 million from the Saudis. Saad needs to get organized, he said; he can not repeat the "security failure" of importing unarmed Sunnis from the north to deter Hizballah.

¶16. (C) Independent Shia will have no chance in the 2009 elections, Hamadeh added, given that proportional representation will not be used.

HIZBALLAH KEEPS ARMS IN ALEY, CHOUF REGIONS

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¶17. (C) Jumblatt explained his recent rapprochement with rival Druze leader Talal Arslan (Ref B) as an effort to protect the Druze in the Chouf and Aley regions from Hizballah. (Note: These two Druze strongholds witnessed bloody clashes between Hizballah and the Druze during the recent clashes, which would have been worse had it not been for this marriage of convenience. End note.) He claimed Hizballah fighters had now departed both regions; however, they maintained arms, including RPGs, in both regions.

¶18. (C) Jumblatt continued that LAF had deployed on the infamous "888" (meters) hill between the two areas, but not on key access roads leading from the Hizballah-dominated southern Beirut suburb of Dahiye to the two regions. (Note: "888" hill played a strategic role during the civil war, determining who controlled both Aley and the Chouf. End note.) He dismissed opposition Druze Wiam Wihab as a "headache, marginalized, and a mercenary."

¶19. (C) Jumblatt noted that he was providing \$30,000 to each family of victims from the fighting, adding that the Higher Relief Council also would provide assistance to both regions.

REGIONAL POWERS WEAKENED AT DOHA

¶20. (C) Jumblatt said the Saudis had been left out Doha; the Saudi-brokered Taif agreement lasted from 1989 until "yesterday," he said, half-jokingly. Egypt was playing an important role either, preoccupied with domestic problems and Hamas. The U.S., failing to have delivered on the Road Map, had been unable to counter Islamic radicals like Hamas and

Hizballah. Instead, the winner at Doha was the Iran-Syria-Qatar axis.

QATARI SEDUCTION

¶21. (C) On a humorous note, Hamadeh relayed that the Qataris had successfully "seduced the delegations like a pretty girl," by first hosting them at a five-star hotel, then, after they had achieved their objectives, sending them home in second class on a Qatari airliner.

COMMENT

¶22. (C) Jumblatt's apparent satisfaction with the Doha agreement probably is explained by two factors: 1) his Druze constituency is now safe from Hizballah (he refused an invitation by Saad to accompany him to Saudi Arabia, citing the need to get back to the Chouf); and 2) his electoral prospects in 2009 probably will not change significantly under the 1960 law. In Lebanon more than anywhere, all politics in local. End comment.

SISON